

D: PARTICIPANTS' REFLECTIVE RESPONSES

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Participants' Survey – Reflective Responses Q 1-8

Q1. What about the course did you consider essential?

Many responses included multiple points, which did not provide as much clarity as expected. The responses fell into 4 distinct areas. Others are grouped under Miscellaneous.

- Course Content: The learning that occurred about the **Catholic Tradition** prompted the largest single-issue response, followed by **Scripture**, both Hebrew and Christian. There was a range of general comments about many other aspects of the course content.
- Personal Faith Development: This area also elicited a strong, specific response particularly concerning the opportunities that were given for it to occur.
- Teaching Methods: in particular the **assignments** and **reflective activities** were highlighted as essential elements of the course. Two respondents also considered the **face-to-face** learning important.
- An experience of Faith Community: was identified as an essential element for a number of participants.
- Miscellaneous: These responses were general in nature with respondents not discriminating in their responses.

The correlation between what was considered essential by participants and the course objectives is high. The only course objectives not reflected in what was considered to be essential to the course were those related to ministry.

Q2. What would you consider the most critical feature of the course?

A number of respondents (7) misread the question and thought they were being asked to be 'critical'. 4 main areas of comment emerged. Other comments were grouped under Miscellaneous.

- *Faith Development*: 9 respondents considered faith development alone to be the critical feature. 14 others contextualized their faith development: 7 within course content and their experience of a faith community; 2 within their Catholicity; 2 within course content and their faith community, and another 2 within course content and ministry.
- *Course Content*: elicited 11 specific responses with a variety of units being mentioned.
- *The Experience of Community*: 8 respondents commented on the importance of sharing the journey with others, 6 more specified the importance of the lecturers to this experience.
- *Ecclesiology*: 5 respondents commented on the importance of Church as an area of study.
- *Open Discussion*: was mentioned by 4 respondents as being critical to their experience, particularly as laity.
- *Miscellaneous*: this included 1 reflective statement and the criticisms mentioned in initial statement re: the quality of this question. The criticisms included: lack of time; information overload; some readings too difficult; tension within parishes; no early marks; too much didactic teaching. Some of these are picked up again in the responses to Q8.

These responses are consistent with the responses to Q1. The dual objectives of faith formation and knowledge are clearly the two priorities for participants.

Q3. What was a significant point of growth or transformation for you in the course?

*This question elicited many lengthy responses from participants. The categories of responses are consistent with those in the first 2 questions with the addition of **Personal Growth and Spirituality**.*

- *Units of Study*: 19 respondents specified particular areas of study that effected change within them. Those mentioned more than once were: **Vatican II; Trinity; Hebrew Scriptures; Stages of Faith**.
- *Personal Faith*: 18 detailed growth in this area. Some mentioned particular courses that facilitated their growth in faith.
- *The Experience of Community*: for 9 respondents their growth was experienced within the context of a community of faith.
- *Spirituality*: 8 respondents experienced growth as a result of **spiritual direction** or specific spiritual experiences e.g. **prayer; retreats**.
- *Personal Growth*: 7 respondents were aware of their growth on a very personal level.
- *The Catholic Faith*: for 3 respondents their point of growth was in relation to their Catholicity.

The data indicates that participants' experiences of growth and transformation are grounded very tangibly in their concrete experiences of the course. Their ability to connect experience and learning is clearly evident.

Q4. What questions/issues/considerations have arisen for you out of the course?

It is in this question that we elicit another range of responses. Once again respondents have been detailed and considered in their answers. They cover 6 general areas.

- *Integration of learning with experience of Church: 28% of respondents indicated this was an area of tension for them.*
- *Questions of 'what to do next' and further study: 22% were concerned with the implications of the course for their future as individuals, as students wanting more, and as members of the faith community.*
- *Questions of personal faith: 13% were aware of the changes in this area of their life and felt a keen awareness of the desire to keep these changes at the forefront of their life.*
- *Specific concerns about the Church: 11% expressed concerns about the Church and its future and mission.*
- *Doctrinal questions: A few respondents were left with questions of doctrine.*
- *The desire to pass on what had been learned: this was the yearning and awareness of a number of participants.*

A possible implication of these responses could be the need for a closer look at the transition process from the course to community. They also raise the possibility of ongoing opportunities for faith development/education.

Q5. Has your experience of the course made it easier/more difficult for you to be part of the Church? How?

Once again this question elicited very honest and detailed responses. They cover 8 areas.

- *It is easier because the relationship has changed:* was indicated by 22 respondents as the key factor that made it easier. Many commented on a new sense of belonging.
- *I feel more comfortable:* was important to 5 respondents.
- *I can hold the tension:* 15 respondents were aware of the ways in which it was both easier and more difficult. Their comments indicate an ability and choice to live with this tension and struggle.
- *It is challenging:* 7 are more challenged in their participation and this is not easy for them.
- *I don't feel I belong:* 2 don't feel they belong to the church community but are able to distinguish and claim their newfound enlightenment as liberating.
- *No change:* for varied personal reasons 3 feel there has been no change in their relationship with the church.
- *Miscellaneous:* 1 comment only.

Much material for reflection lies in the detail of these responses. Once again there may be some implications for both the transition from the course and for on-going support.

Q6. What did you want to get from the course?

Respondents were very specific in their answers and this is reflected in the range of responses.

- *To grow in faith:* 21 of responses clearly indicated this hope. Common phrases used were: 'to deepen', 'to develop', 'to mature', and 'to understand'. As with Q2 some respondents connected this with ministry and participation in the faith community, others with their desire to understand the Catholic tradition.
- *To gain knowledge:* of the 28 responses the predominant response (14) clearly expressed a desire of participants to increase their knowledge of their Catholic faith and heritage. A few more specifically referred to rituals and traditions, 6 wanted a more general understanding of faith, some wanted knowledge to aid them in ministry, scripture was identified in 2 responses, and 4 expressed more general hopes for knowledge.
- *Ministry outcomes:* 5 respondents expressed that their key hope was for ministry, both in the general sense and in the context of work.
- *Greater confidence:* for 4 respondents their hope was to feel more confident in what they could give, in knowledge, and in becoming more professional.
- *The experience of renewal:* 3 respondents indicated the importance of experiencing a sense of renewal as an outcome of the course.
- *To experience a faith community:* this was the specific hope of 3 respondents.
- *To find my place:* within the church structures. Gender was important for one respondent and for the other a clearer sense of personal direction.
- *Undefined:* for 4 respondents their motivation was intuitive. 'The prompting of others', 'the movement of the spirit', 'it was there', 'I just wanted to do it', were all responses.

These responses are made from the perspective of having completed the course and as such have been effected by the course. The consistency of responses is once again evident. Although unlike Q1 and 2 specific hopes for ministry outcomes are present.

Q7. Did you get it? (What you wanted)

Responses here were very clear.

- 'Yes' unequivocally: was the answer of 68% of respondents. What was received was more abstract than the expressed hopes. Common words/phrases used were: hope, encouragement, understanding, confidence, personal growth, a sense of community, membership of a community, empowered, more assertive, refueled, well informed, challenged, relaxed, a deepening of my personal relationship with God.
- 'Yes' with some qualification: 11% of respondents. Some in their connection with Church/community acknowledged ambivalence, and for others there was recognition that the course was a beginning of an on-going process.
- 'No': 5% who have not finished the course. One respondent was frustrated by the dominance of others' agenda. This affected his level of satisfaction.
- Acknowledgement of growth: the remaining comments were more a statement of reflection on the experience of the course. All of them were positive.

For those who unequivocally 'got what they wanted' there was no correlation between what they stated as their hoped for outcomes and what they acknowledged as receiving.

Q8. What should be done differently?

68% indicated some change would be helpful.

34% indicated no change was necessary.

There were 3 main areas of change suggested.

- *Course structure and teaching:* including: more group discussions; less information to be covered; a less heavy reading requirement. There were some comments about specific course content. Comments indicate a need to process/integrate the information covered.
- *Ministry and beyond:* 8 respondents commented on the practicum/parish ministry experience. A level of dissatisfaction and confusion is evident. Particularly in the area of expectations.
- *General comments:* 7 other comments covered suggestions re: time of lectures; focus of course- who is being targeted? (This comment gave a slight insight into why some did not complete the course).
- *About the teachers:* there were 3 comments related to the teaching staff. No changes suggested_ only gratitude and praise.

These comments are very specific in nature and contain some considered practical suggestions.